Pancakes in Prison Like Bread Cast Upon the Waters

By THOMAS J. MALONE

WHEN C. S. Reed resigned last June as warden of the Minnesota State Prison, Stillwater, to become sales manager of the Michigan State Prison, J. J. Sullivan, then deputy warden, was promoted to the wardenship.

Mr. Sullivan made no changes in prison regulations or methods on donning civilian clothes in place of the blue uniform and moving to the outer office from his old one beyond the first barred door. He had been in accord with the program of his predecessor and with that of the warden before him, Henry Wolfer, the man who conceived and superintended the building of the Minnesota institution. But he did make one notable change affecting the lives of the inmates.

He began serving pancakes for breakfast.

Most men are just naturally pancake fans. A few days after Warden Sullivan took hold, each of the seven hundred seventy-eight inmates encountered something that many had almost forgotten, something that teased the smell, gladdened the sight and rejoiced the taste—a stack of wheats.

Before every man at breakfast that morning was placed a plate containing three piping hot, mellow brown, crackle-fringed, six-inch wheat cakes. With the cakes were syrup, sausage and coffee.

In the memory of the oldest inhabitant—and he has been there since 1876—pancakes had never before been served to inmates of the prison. Think of forty-four years without a pancake! The constitution has something to say against "cruel and unusual punishments."

Warden Sullivan, himself a pancaker, had not heralded the coming of the feast. It was a surprise to the men. Three thousand cakes were baked and served that morning, for some of the men "got away" with six or more, second "orders" not being denied. The cooks had no time for flipping nor somersaulting.

Production in the prison factories increased notably that day. A few days later pancakes were again served for breakfast. They have become a regular part of the prison menu. Twice a week breakfast centers around them. Corn and buckwheat cakes are in prospect.

The new warden made another innovation in the bill of fare. He began serving tea for dinner, the noon meal. Theretofore the routine had been coffee for breakfast, water for dinner and tea for supper. While inmates may not be interviewed and their views are not obtainable for publication, tea for dinner, coming after the pancake surprise, is understood to have intensified a conviction that the warden had at heart the welfare of his wards.

"I believe prisoners should be well fed," he said, when the news of these gustatory privileges had reached the outside world and he was asked about them. "Minnesota has always fed its prison inmates well. I believe in going even further.

"Men in prison retain their old outside appetites for 'eats.' The doughnut man craves doughnuts; the pumpkin pie devotee dreams about pumpkin pie. We do not pamper the inmates but we treat them like men—think of them as such. Doing that, we take the logical step to pancakes for breakfast."

J. J. Sullivan, promoted to the wardenship for merit after nineteen years of service in the employ of the Minnesota prison, believes in the good old-fashioned, time-tested proverb that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. He will challenge the anatomists on that. He believes it applies to the man inside a prison as well as to the man outside.

The theory is that a well-fed prisoner is likely to be a fairly contented one. The conception of the well-regulated prisoner as pale, emaciated, depressed and despondent does not obtain at Minnesota, and never has obtained there.

"I joined the prison staff as a guard at $40 a month," the warden recalled, when asked to tell something about changes in prison conditions in his nineteen years there. "'Upside down' about covers what has taken place.

"When I began guard duty, the old prison was in use, at the foot of the hill in the heart of Stillwater. In its place, we have today a model group of buildings in a 22-acre inclosure two miles from Stillwater."

The prison owns one thousand acres of land. Five hundred seventy-two acres are under cultivation.

"As I recall it," he continued, "the cells were lighted by candles when I came to the prison. Each cell had an earthen jar filled once a day with water which served for both drinking and washing.

"The men ate breakfast and dinner in the dining hall but took supper in their cells, a solitary experience. Only such tobacco was used as was made in the prison.

"All inmates wore the regulation prison shoe, coarse and heavy—brogans. Only the prison issue of other wearing apparel was permitted. Conversation among inmates was allowed only when they were let into the yard on the big holidays—the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas, and New Year's.

"An inmate could have only one visit a month from the outside."

So bleak a condition no longer exists at the prison. Mr. Sullivan's eyes twinkled under bushy brows as he told the more pleasing story of the present.

"Today every cell in the Minnesota prison is electric-lighted and has running water, hot and cold, and a lavatory.

"All three meals daily are served in the dining hall. Food comes hot from the ranges. Tobacco may be sent to the men from the outside or they may buy it themselves, all kinds.

"As for clothing, inmates today wear prison issue coat and trousers, a plain gray much like that of the mail carrier's uniform, but they may wear any good quality business shoe which they may care to buy or which may be sent them. They may have white handkerchiefs and underwear within their means. As every able-bodied inmate makes money by his work in the prison industries, each has a fund on which he may draw for such purposes.

"Conversation is permitted at meals every other day and whenever the men are out in the yard. They are out not only on holidays but on virtually every Saturday afternoon in summer.

"We do not limit arbitrarily the number of visitors an inmate may have in a given period. Whether a visitor shall see an inmate is determined by the circumstances in each case. Our policy is liberal."

The prison attitude toward recreation and diversion is enlightening.

"There were no games in the old days," went on the former $40-a-month guard. "Today baseball is an established part of the institution program, with a first and a second inmate team every season and with a game every Saturday afternoon and every holiday, if weather permits, through the summer. Civilian teams from outside meet the prison team on its home diamond.

"Horseshoe pitching has been introduced recently. Other games are in prospect.

"For those who desire to engage in special study along cultural lines there is the Pierian Chautauqua Circle, made up wholly of inmates, which holds regular meetings, observes a definite program and now and then stages an entertainment in the prison auditorium before the rest of the institution's population. This circle is self-directed. Its literary, dramatic, and musical programs are justly popular.

"The prison band is another agency that serves to lift the inmate out of the monotony of his surroundings."

Warden Sullivan was quick to nail an intimation that possibly Minnesota inmates were too well cared for, had too good a time.

"These changes have not been introduced with a view to softening the prisoner's lot, as if to make prison life attractive. Prison life will never be attractive to men born to be free. The very fact of restraint, of being kept within bounds, is severe punishment.

"If we are to get anywhere in trying to help the convict to be a better man he must be in a state of mind that will permit of betterment. Reformation cannot be forced. Society is just as well protected when prisoners are treated like men."

Two broad questions were asked the warden.

One was this: "Are you an optimist or a pessimist as to prison results on the inmate? Does your experience convince you that most inmates really learn their lesson and do not revert to crime after discharge? Or do the majority go back to lawbreaking?"

The other was: "Do you believe most of your inmates are here because they are basically criminal in make-up, have a wrong mental slant through either birth or environment that almost inevitably impelled them to do things that sent them prisonward?"

J. J. Sullivan declared himself an optimist. "Emphatically," he said, "the majority of men who serve prison sentences do learn the lesson of prison life and go straight afterward. It is the occasional backslider, or the chronic crime committer, who attracts public attention and gives ground to the widely accepted belief that most prison inmates do not profit much by their experience.

"Men in the work know better. I get letters every week from men who at some time or other served time in Minnesota prison. They are splendid letters, many of them, fine, manly letters from men who have made good. They tell me what they are doing, how they are getting along, about their families, their prospects. Many have changed their names, gone to new places and begun all over again.

"In the various prison industries—the twine factory, the farm implement shops, the agricultural work—men learn trades they can follow through life after release. Many acquire a liking for hard labor, find zest in producing things worth while. Not a few learn to read and write while in prison. Others learn lessons of great value about the care of their bodies. The prison is a school."

Of course, this answer to the first question suggested the answer to the second.

"There probably is a 'criminal type,'" the warden said. "Some men seem unable to keep out of crime, but by no means all men who get sent to prison are such.

"On the other hand, the pickpocket or the forger who is ever at it, plying a trade, seeing no wrong in it, returning to it with each release from confinement—he may be a criminal type."

It is a big job to be warden of the world's model prison, but J. J. Sullivan, hard-boiled veteran of "the silent city," champion of the pancake, refuses to get excited over it.

J. J. SULLIVAN,
Warden, Minnesota State Prison, Stillwater.

All Cairo Watches Moving of Holy Carpet

This photograph just received in the United States illustrates the ceremony incident to the departure of the holy carpet from Cairo to Mecca which takes place yearly in the late summer. An elaborate ritual attends the pilgrimage and the ceremony is one of the most brilliant in the picturesque East. The start of the pilgrimage is pictured.